

Robert Cunningham Miller (1899-1984)

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Dr. Robert Cunningham Miller was born at Blairsville, Pennsylvania, on July 3, 1899. He died at Herrick Hospital in Berkeley, California, on June 11, 1984, in his eighty-fourth year, after several years of declining health. Robert C. Miller was one of three sons and two daughters of Coursen Herbert Miller and Alma (née Gilmore) Miller. Both of his parents were ordained ministers in the Free Methodist Church.

According to the Membership Record on file with the Pacific Coast Entomological Society, Robert C. Miller became interested in insects "In the backyard, at age of 4 years; received encouragement from many entomologists, including T. N. Brown of Uniontown, Penna., and E. C. Van Dyke (a correspondent of T. N. Brown)." As Director of the California Academy of Sciences, from 1938 to 1963, Dr. Miller strongly supported the association of the Pacific Coast Entomological Society with the Academy and served as Treasurer of this society for twenty-one years.

Robert C. Miller attended Public Schools and Greenville College, a Methodist College in Greenville, Illinois, where he received an A.B. degree in 1920. Majoring in Marine Biology, he received his A.M. (in 1921) and Ph.D. (in 1923) degrees from the University of California, Berkeley, with Joseph Grinnell as his major professor. While a graduate student, Miller studied marine boring organisms that were threatening the piers in San Francisco Bay.

Robert C. Miller was successively Assistant Professor (1924-1930), Associate Professor (1930-1936), and Professor (1936-1938) of Zoology and Oceanography at the University of Washington. In 1929-1932 he received a leave of absence to serve as Visiting Professor at Lingnan University (now Zhongshan University) in Canton, China. On September 15, 1937, he married a lovely fellow faculty member, Lea Van Puymbroeck. Their marriage took place in Ghent, Belgium, the native country of his wife.

In 1938, the California Academy of Sciences was searching for a Director, and Joseph Grinnell, a Trustee, recommended his former student. Robert C. Miller accepted the Director's position even though he did not apply for it, and during his quarter century of guidance the institution prospered and advanced. During his directorship, the Alexander F. Morrison Planetarium was built, with its unique star projection system designed and built under the direction of the Academy's Albert S. Getten and Dr. G Dallas Hanna. This was followed by the Lovell White Hall of Man and Nature, the Dean Witter African Hall, the Alice Eastwood Hall of Botany, the John Ward Mailliard, Jr. Library, the May Treat Morrison Auditorium, and new quarters for the expanded Botany and Birds and Mammals departments, as well as a one and one-half million dollar renovation of Steinhart Aquarium. Dr. Miller founded *Pacific Discovery*, a journal of nature and culture



Figure 1. Robert Cunningham Miller. Photograph taken at California Academy of Sciences (Courtesy Academy Archives).

in the *Pacific World* (serving as managing editor 1948–1963), and the popular television show, *Science in Action*, so well narrated by Drs. Tom Groody and Earl S. Herald.

Robert C. Miller chose to provide headquarters for and served as officer of at least two organizations during his association with the Academy—as Secretary to the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for twenty-eight years, and as Treasurer of the Pacific Coast Entomological Society for twenty-one years. The Academy also contracted for the California State Marine Research Commission in the coordination of the California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigations (CALCOFI), including studies of the Pacific Sardine, Northern Anchovy, and Herring.

In 1943, Robert C. Miller succeeded Edwin R. Leach as Treasurer of the Pacific Coast Entomological Society and served in this office until his retirement in 1963. For most of this time, Mrs. Vashti Hawley Getten, Dr. Miller's administrative secretary, handled all the accounts and billings for the Society. Fortunately she continued as a volunteer for the eighteen years that I served as Treasurer of the Society, some of the latter years, after her own retirement from the Academy. Nearly forty years of support to the Pacific Coast Entomological Society was initiated by Dr. Miller and continued by his successor as Director, Dr. George E. Lindsay. On November 15, 1968 Dr. Miller was elected an Honored Member of the Pacific Coast Entomological Society.

Robert C. Miller's earlier association and friendship with Drs. Don L. Frizzell and Harriet Exline Frizzell at the University of Washington, was supportive in the establishment, in 1972, of the Frizzell Arachnological Fund at the California Academy of Sciences, a fund with a principal of over \$100,000.

Robert C. Miller published over 220 articles in a broad spectrum of biological topics—on conservation, on fishes, on birds both of the Pacific Coast of North America and China, on insects, on botany, on mollusks, on biographies, on reviews, etc. His first paper, published in 1916, treated the Dayflower (*Commelina communis*), while his book, *The Sea*, first published by Random House, Inc. in 1966, was translated and published in four additional languages.

Some early papers published in the field of Entomology by Dr. Miller include:

- 1917. Tenacity to life in insects. *Scientific American Supplement*, 83(2148):133.
- 1917. Seventy-five thousand insects. *The Guide to Nature*, 10(10):153–155.
- 1917. The story of the dragon. *American Motherhood*, 45(2):111–113.
- 1929. Subcutaneous parasitism of a young warbler by fly larvae. *Murrelet*, 10(1): 13–14.
- 1930. Thomas Nesmith Brown, *Entomological News*, 41(1):29–30.
- 1931. The Brenthidae and Lycidae of China (translated from the German of Kleine). *Lingnan Science Journal*, 7:491–496.

Robert C. Miller was a man of keen wit, and he enjoyed telling stories that were always sophisticated and pertinent. He delighted in a play on words and his pleasure in using the correct word is well shown in his vice-presidential address presented at the 32nd meeting of the AAAS.

The Pacific Coast Entomological Society, the Academy, and Science in general are fortunate to have had Dr. Miller's strong interest, support, and guidance.

Robert C. Miller's wife preceded him in death in 1979. Dr. Miller is survived by two brothers, Mendal Miller, of Seattle, Washington, and Donald Miller, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, and by two sisters, Lois Winslow, of Stanton, California, and Jean Bowman of Santa Ana, California, and many nieces and nephews.